

By Mark Koenig

Recognition that

Dr. Harold Oaks



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Oaks is a
pioneer.

Several years ago, when a discussion came up about creating an annual award, the TYA/USA board took a thoughtful and measured approach.

"We talked about it a long time and listened to our members," says Karen Sharp, Executive Director of the TYA/USA board. "Some felt that, quite frankly, it's refreshing that we don't do a bunch of awards. We don't want the organization to solely be about that." She explains, "I think that especially in the TYA world, it doesn't come naturally to a lot of people to pat themselves on the back. I think it's the nature of how TYA works." For a long time, this notion steered the board's collective thinking. Eventually though, board members started seeing positive potential. An annual award might serve as a rallying force for the TYA community. "There were several on the board who really saw the value in honoring an organization and an individual who have impacted our field," explains Sharp. "After lots and lots of discussion we settled on it being the right thing to do and on Harold Oaks being the right namesake." In 2013, the Harold Oaks award was born, acknowledging significant contributions of individuals and organizations in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences.

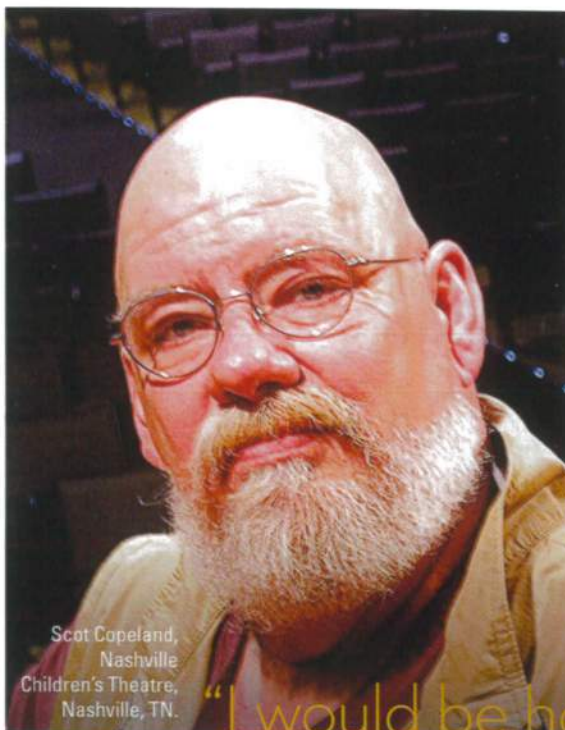
Few have impacted the field as much as Dr. Harold Oaks himself. Oaks' commitment to the craft has spanned almost his entire life. He has taught and directed at the university level for over three decades; twelve of those years were spent chairing Brigham Young University's Department of Theatre & Film, where he is currently an emeritus Professor of Theatre. Oaks served as President of ASSITEJ/USA (International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People) from 1988-1995 and ASSITEJ International President from 1999-2002. Over his career, Oaks has founded and co-founded multiple long-lasting theatre companies specializing in Theatre for Young Audiences. He has written hundreds of articles and publications, directed more than 45 plays internationally and continues to create theatrical experiences for young people all over the world. The list of his professional accomplishments is staggering. As he has grown as a TYA artist, so has the art of TYA itself. Simply put, Oaks is a pioneer.

"I would be honored with someone handing me a Dixie cup if Harold Oaks' name was on it," says Scot Copeland, 2014 Harold Oaks Award Individual Recipient. "He has been an inspiration

Renews

to me since I was very young and I think it is absolutely marvelous that TYA/USA is recognizing his significance by creating this award in his name." Copeland is entering his 30th year as artistic director of Nashville Children's Theatre. Like Oaks, he has also served as TYA/USA (formerly ASSITEJ/USA) President (1997-2004). Copeland was honored in May 2014 during the One Theatre World: Sessions at the New Visions/New Voices conference at the Kennedy Center, along with Metro Theater Company, the award's Organization Recipient. "Honestly," Copeland confesses, "I'm a little uncomfortable with things like awards." But despite his awkwardness under the spotlight, Copeland sees the award's true meaning. "It's an important thing for the field. It's a way that the national organization (TYA/USA) can serve individual organizations at home. We work in something that, outside of just saying how big your audience is, is very hard to quantify. So recognizing organizations and individuals who are out in the trenches gives solid, useful, quantifiable support."

Beyond the trenches, Copeland feels the award acts as a touchstone, especially since it bears Oaks' name. "We are not in this for us," he explains. "I don't think Harold has ever forgotten the field's roots in social services. He uses his talents and expertise with a desire and an absolute awareness of the fact that he's changing small pieces of the world. That's ultimately the spirit and the philosophy that fuels our entire profession. It's very good any time we can be reminded of that."



Scot Copeland,
Nashville
Children's Theatre,
Nashville, TN.

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